



Title: The right to food in theory and practice...

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Identifying the hungry

FAO



The Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System (FIVIMS) is being developed by FAO and its partners to find out who in the world is hungry and the reasons for their hunger. This information is one of the prerequisites for solving the problems of hunger and malnutrition. It is also essential to the World Food Summit (WFS) Plan of Action's aim of reducing the number of undernourished people in the developing world from more than 800 million in 1996 to half that number by no later than 2015.

As a first step, some basic terminology has been defined for use in FIVIMS and other hunger-eradicating activities:

Food security: all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

Food insecurity: people are not consuming sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food to meet their minimum needs. This may be owing to the unavailability of food, lack of social or economic access, instability of supplies or incomes, and/or inappropriate utilization at household level. Food insecurity and poor conditions of health and sanitation are the major causes of poor nutritional status.

Vulnerability: the full range of factors that place people at risk of becoming food-insecure, including those factors that affect their ability to cope.

Food insecurity and vulnerability information and mapping system: any system or network of systems that assembles, analyses and disseminates information about people who are food-insecure or at risk of hunger and malnutrition.



An officer from the Central Statistical Office of Zambia collecting data from a village
Information about who is hungry and why is essential to solving world hunger and malnutrition.

The role of national FIVIMS

Important initial tasks for a national FIVIMS are to:

- identify food-insecure and vulnerable groups - who they are and where they are located;
- determine the degree of inadequate food consumption and undernutrition among these groups;
- ascertain why they are food-insecure or vulnerable.

Thereafter, a national FIVIMS works on an ongoing basis to:

- gather and analyse relevant data for measuring and monitoring food insecurity and vulnerability;
- provide up-to-date information to policy-makers and members of civil society at all levels in the country;
- facilitate assessment of the various policy and programme options;
- improve users' access to information through networking and sharing;
- provide information that may be called for at the international level.

At the national level, a FIVIMS is country-driven and user-focused. It is based on information systems already in existence, responds to the information needs of the different user groups within the country itself and is operated and controlled by the country.

National focal points will play catalytic and coordinating roles in initiating the implementation of FIVIMS activities and maintaining relationships with relevant international organizations and databases.

The development of a FIVIMS at the country level is promoted by the thematic groups of the United Nations Administrative Committee for Coordination (ACC) Network on Rural Development and Food Security, a mechanism established to ensure appropriate interagency coordination for the WFS follow-up at the field level.

FROM THE WFS PLAN OF ACTION

"... governments, in cooperation among themselves and with international institutions,... will encourage relevant agencies within the UN system to initiate... consultations on the further elaboration and definition of a food insecurity and vulnerability information and mapping system to be developed in a coordinated manner; member countries and their institutions and other organizations, as appropriate, should be included in the development, operation and use of the system; FAO should play a catalytic role in this effort, within the framework of the ad hoc inter-agency task forces on the follow-up of the UN conferences."

Commitment 7, paragraph 59B

"Governments, in partnership with all actors of civil society, as appropriate, will develop and periodically update where necessary, a national food insecurity and vulnerability information and mapping system, indicating areas and populations, including at local level, affected by or at risk of hunger and malnutrition, and elements contributing to food insecurity, making maximum use of existing data and other information systems in order to avoid duplication of efforts."

Commitment 2, paragraph 20A

"It is necessary to target those people and areas suffering most from hunger and malnutrition and identify causes and take remedial action to improve the situation. A more complete, user-friendly source of information at all levels would enable this."

Opening paragraph 4.

Towards a global FIVIMS

Databases held by international agencies and other institutions will be linked together in a common global FIVIMS database. This would be a decentralized information system for posting and distributing FIVIMS-related information, data and maps over the Internet's World Wide Web.

As the national FIVIMS improve the quality and coverage of their own information databases, more and more of the data they collect can be used to

enrich the appropriate international databases collaborating in the global FIVIMS. This information will improve the international community's monitoring of food security trends at the global level, thus facilitating the mobilization of resources with special reference to the needs of countries facing deteriorating food security, nutrition and health situations and resource degradation.

Putting it all together

An international FIVIMS programme is being developed and coordinated through the Inter-agency Working Group on FIVIMS (IAWG-FIVIMS), which has its Permanent Secretariat at FAO. The international FIVIMS programme supports both national and global FIVIMS.

The international FIVIMS programme will:

- generate technical materials and provide an oversight for the development and application of guidelines and manuals;
- mobilize resources for national FIVIMS as needed;
- help with the definition of common standards and improvement of data quality;
- promote information exchange and networking;
- support the development of a global FIVIMS.

FIVIMS, at all levels, will provide the information required to monitor and guide progress towards meeting the goals set by the WFS.